

A
LETTER
TO THE
Freemen & Inhabitants
OF THE
TOWN OF CAMBRIDGE,
ON
THE STATE OF THE BOROUGH,

BY
GEORGE PRYME, Esq. M. A.
BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

“ Ministerial grace
“ Deals him out money from the public chest,
“ Or if that mine be shut, some private purse
“ Supplies his need with an usurious loan
“ To be refunded duly when his vote,
“ Well manag’d, shall have earned its worthy price.
“ Oh innocent compared with arts like these,
“ Crape and cock’d pistol and the whistling ball
“ Sent through the traveller’s temples.”

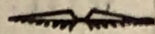
Cowper’s Task.

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A LETTER, &c.



GENTLEMEN,

It is late before I fulfil my promise of addressing you on the state of the Borough. I have delayed till many must have supposed, and some of you had hoped, that I had abandoned the intention. Circumstances have prevented me, the detail of which would be tedious and unimportant. But the subject is not temporary: it is not one of those which excite interest for a while, pass away, and are forgotten: nor even is it like those political events which are eagerly discussed at the time; and then yield their place to others in the varying scene of public affairs. But this affects us as much at the end of ten years as of ten days; it must affect our children, and all of our latest posterity who may remain inhabitants of this town. And I trust there is now an attention excited; a fervent feeling called forth; which will neither slumber, nor decay, but will gather strength in its progress; which partial failure cannot damp, nor success

render careless or inactive. My present purpose is therefore, not so much to exhort, as to inform. It is to relate, (what till recently has been quite unknown,* and is yet but imperfectly understood) the earlier history of the Borough; to expose more fully its later corruptions; to address some observations on the conduct of those misnamed *Freemen* who conduct, or who will not prevent, the foul transactions alluded to; and to make some suggestions to the other inhabitants of the Town.

Numerous charters were granted to the town from the time of Henry I. to that of Elizabeth; but these are silent on all the points that can now affect our political interests. They grant to the inhabitants the privilege of having their own Magistrates, Coroners, and Courts of Justice, distinct from those of the County; of holding for ever, at a fixed rent, the tolls of the streets, fairs, and markets. The Charters of Eliz. relate to similar privileges, and especially to Stirbridge fair. Those of James I. and Charles I. give more ample directions for the government of the Borough, but, like all the others, are silent as to the persons entitled to the freedom thereof. That of James I.

* As a proof of the extreme anxiety to conceal every thing respecting the state of the Corporation, even from the Corporators themselves, I may refer to a regulation made in 1808, that no person should inspect the books without an order in writing from the Mayor, or a vote of the Hall. This regulation is in direct defiance of two Acts of Parliament.

ordains merely in general terms, "that the Borough shall be and shall remain a free Borough of itself, and that the men of the same Borough shall be free Burgesses." The void Charter of Charles II. which is equally silent on that point, will be mentioned presently.

The regular records of the Corporation commence in the year 1544; soon after which a bye-law appears, ordaining that "any free burgess of this town in his lifetime, may make one of his sons, which he will, free of this borough; and after the decease of a freeman his eldest son to pay for his freedom only to the box 3s. 8d. and 3s. 4d. to the officers; and any other son as they can agree with the house." This seems to imply a right or usage in favor of all the sons, and to alter and regulate only the sum or "fine" (as it is always called in the early books) on admission*; for though no mention is made of the fine, which the son in the father's lifetime is to pay, yet the entries afterwards are "for the fine of 4d.

* That this was the case, and that it was so considered, appears from the following and several other entries soon after this bye-law: "Michael Foyster filius et haeres Geo. Foyster, Alderman, secundum ordinationem Villae pro fine tantum 3s. 8d. pix: et cost: cur."

"M. Foyster, son and heir of G. Foyster, Alderman, according to the ordinance of the Town, for the fine of 3s. 8d. only to the box, and the costs of the court," i. e. 3s. 4d. to the officers.

His fine before the bye-law would have been 4d. only to the Town Clerk, as appears by previous entries.

“only to the Town Clerk,” therefore, in fact, a gratuitous admission appears to have been intended, and the mention of a fine was unnecessary. A great part of the entries of admission by birth from that time to 1576, are in the terms of “son”* or “Filius” only, which would not have been the case if the right, as now pretended, was only in the first-born son. If the younger sons were not entitled, it was unnecessary to mention them in the bye law, or to say that their fine was not fixed; for the Corporation had always the power of making honorary freemen. The words “as they can agree,” seems to imply a right of admission on such reasonable fine† as might be assessed by the house, just like the arbitrary fine of a copyhold, the reasonableness of which is controlled by Courts of Law.

In 1576 another bye law was made, ordaining “that any freeman may have all his sons free for “4d. a piece to the Town Clerk,” * * * “and this “whether they come in the life of their father or “after his death.” The reduction of the fine would naturally render the admissions of younger sons more numerous, for a vote was not then, as it is now, a marketable commodity.

* During the Commonwealth the entries are in English.

† A similar right was claimed and established in the borough of Hastings—*Moore v. Mayor of Hastings*.—X State Trials, 137, Appx.—Hargr. edit.

From the year 1582 to 1610, the records of the Corporation are *said* to be lost. This circumstance is exceedingly mysterious. They would contain the entries respecting the very important charter of James I. and probably many other matters unfavorable to the close system. Their suppression or destruction was certainly intentional: they were in existence fifty or sixty years ago; for I have seen a manuscript, compiled about that time by a Corporator, which contains copies of several entries in the years 1608 and 1609.

From the recommencement of those records, which have been graciously permitted to remain in the Town Clerk's Office down to the latter end of the reign of Charles II. the admissions in right of birth, are on the same extensive plan.— They are very numerous; generally in the form of “son” only, and afford, as before, many instances of two or even three sons of the same burgess. The system then began of closing the Borough; that is, of depriving your ancestors of their political rights, and of bartering them away to the enemies of the constitution, for the dishonest gain of a few individuals.

Every one who has read the History of England, knows that the reign of Charles II. after he felt himself strong enough to throw

aside his mask, was little else but a series of attempts, by threat, force, and fraud, to subvert our admirable constitution ; and to establish instead of it his own uncontrouled power. But it was impossible to give effect to this foul and deliberate conspiracy while a freely elected House of Commons remained ; he therefore found it desirable to render a great part of them no longer freely elected ; and his minions began to tamper with Corporations. It is clear that a small body of men is much more easily bought than a large one : and that if into this smaller body a number of devoted adherents could be introduced, a very little bribery would then be sufficient. Accordingly, at Cambridge a bye-law was passed in the year 1677, ordering “ that all and every the sons of a “ free Burgess (excepting the sons of a foreign “ Burgess) should have the freedom of the town, “ they and every of them, except the eldest, paying “ the fees of the house.” In 1679, the words “ FILI- “ US NATU MAXIMUS ” were used *for the first time* in the entries of those who happened to be eldest sons of freemen. These steps seemed trifling in themselves, and might therefore pass away without resistance ; but they were important in their consequences, as establishing a difference between the eldest and the younger sons. They began merely by subjecting the younger sons to the payment of certain fees ; and worded the regulation so as

to appear not an imposition upon them, but an exemption in favour of the eldest.

More open and effectual measures soon succeeded. The King's Ministers began, by threatening with one hand, judicial proceedings for the forfeiture of half the existing Charters in the Kingdom, and holding out with the other the promise of fresh Charters if the old ones were *voluntarily* surrendered. A judgment of forfeiture against the city of London, obtained by means of the corrupt and dependent Judges of those times, terrified most other corporations into submission. The charters of Cambridge, where a considerable party was devoted to the arbitrary measures of the Court, were surrendered, and a new one granted in January, 1685.

Its character and effect will be sufficiently shewn by the following abridged extract: " Provided always and we do reserve full power at all times hereafter, to remove the Mayor, High Steward, Recorder, Aldermen, Bailiffs, Common Clerk, and Burgesses of the Common Council, Coroners and Treasurers of the Borough, or any of them, at the will and pleasure of us our heirs or successors, by any order of the Privy Council."

In the Autumn of the same year, it was pretended that the existing bye laws were unfit or

insufficient: a Committee was appointed to frame a new set, which was adopted in 1686, and the whole of the former were repealed. The birthright to the freedom was not likely to escape mutilation; we accordingly find the following enactment—"That a freeman shall have no liberty to make any more of his sons free of the Corporation, but one."

That this might the better escape notice, it comes in only at the tail of a long bye law about the admission of apprentices and of minors; and even then it attempted to limit the right to one only, not specifying the eldest. The grain of poison was mixed and half hidden in the measure of meal, but was not on that account the less fatal. Soon afterwards, Henry Lord Dover with about seventy or eighty of his non-resident adherents, became honorary freemen. Sir Thomas Chichely was removed from the office of High Steward "*in compliance with the King's (James II.) order in Council;*" and Lord Dover unanimously elected in his place "*in obedience to his Majesty's command.*"

The artifice and skill of these measures are remarkable; for, the whole operations against the political freedom of your Ancestors were conducted with the regularity and slow approaches of a siege. It might have been impregnable to

open assault, but every movement drew the outer lines of the besiegers closer around, or introduced fresh traitors within the walls; till at last the fortress became an easy prey to its assailants.

It was, however, not long before they, through whose timidity or corruption this great change was effected, met their deserved reward. In 1688, James II. availed himself of his power, under the new Charter, by degrading nearly twenty officers of the Corporation, and substituting his more thorough-paced dependants in their stead. It is thus that their employers always treat the inferior instruments of villainy and treachery. Despising while they use them, and detesting them for being privy to their own dishonour, they flatter themselves into the belief of a distinction between the guilt of those who aim at conquering others, and of those who sell themselves. Thus, when the vile and purchased services are performed, when fresh ones are no longer wanted, the agents are uncere- moniously discarded, and become the broken tools that knaves have thrown away. They have incurred the contempt or aversion of their employers, the displeasure of their friends, the detestation of the virtuous part of society, and have none to espouse their cause, or pity their ill-treatment. It was thus with many of the betrayers of their fellow townsmen in the reign of James II;

it was thus with a similar degraded body, when, a century afterwards, this Borough was again sold and conveyed away: and thus will it be with all those who now lend themselves to support that interest, whenever their suborners can shake them off, and do without their disgraceful services.

The Borough was now delivered over, bound hand and foot, to Lord Dover; and its chains would have become every day stronger in consequence of the fewer admissions by right, but the change of government effected its liberation. James II. a few weeks before he was expelled for his unconstitutional conduct, issued a proclamation by which the surrender of those Charters, that had not been enrolled, were declared invalid; and the original incorporators were every where required to meet, and to act upon their old charters.

Fortunately the Cambridge surrender was not enrolled; the Corporation met to put themselves upon the old footing; and the unleavened batches of Lord Dover's freemen were no longer permitted to vote, or counted among the real corporators of succeeding reigns.* But unfortunately, no general attempt seems to have been made to set aside the nefarious disfranchisement of the younger sons. Why there was none, we know

* See Journals of the House of Commons. Vol. xvi, p. 300, 301.

not. The reasons which influenced our predecessors thus to neglect the rights of their successors, have perished with them, and we can only conjecture what they were. The expense and difficulty of procuring a Mandamus were then much greater ; for the statute, affording facilities to that process, and giving costs to the successful party, did not pass till the tenth year of Queen Anne. Some persons might probably threaten such a proceeding, and obtain their own object through the fears of the corporation ; for we find a few admissions of younger sons, after the bye law of 1686. Besides, the nation at that time seems to have imagined that a kind of golden age in politics had arrived ; that in expelling the Tyrant, they had cut up the tree of corruption by the roots : they little imagined it would so soon revive, not as before, spreading visibly, like the ivy, its withering grasp around the branches of the oak, obvious to the eye, and easy to be assailed ; but stretching under ground its roots, unnoticed and difficult to be traced. Nothing like a surrender of the Borough, or a destruction of its independence, seems to have been attempted, till the well-known transfer a century afterwards. There were several contests, and it was represented by county gentlemen* of different families, the last of

* Benjamin Keene, of Westhoe, Esq., and James W. Adeane, of Babraham, Esq.

whom was the Grandfather of the candidate who fought your battle in 1818, and one whose virtues are still insuring him the respect and esteem of the county, though they made no impression on the corporators of 1790.

The manner in which, 35 years ago, you were bartered and conveyed away, like the slaves on a Russian estate, or a West Indian plantation, for the nefarious gain of a few individuals, I need not relate—it is well known to you all. The conduct and character of the agents in that transaction, and of those who devoted themselves to perpetuate that bargain, are duly estimated by every honest mind in the town. I therefore pass them by; for I am unwilling, without urgent necessity, to accuse so many individuals who can no longer defend themselves before the earthly tribunal of public opinion.

For 30 years all went on in the smooth quiet course of unresisting servitude. Through the craft or negligence of your oppressors no new batch of foreign freemen had been manufactured till half of the old ones, and many of your original betrayers, had gone to their account. Sounder habits of thinking, and more upright independence had begun to prevail in the town. The Lord and Master of the Borough, with his corrupt agents, probably

imagined that the inhabitants had neither sense to feel, courage to resist, nor spirit to resent ; and the shameless attempt was made to impose upon you forty persons not resident, and for the most part unconnected with the town.* What kind of *free-men* these strangers were to be, the following fact will show. The owner of the Borough wrote to several persons to *offer* them the freedom of the Corporation, and among others to a County Magistrate, who answered that he should be happy to accept of it, but though he agreed with him in political sentiments, that he should consider himself independent. You will not be surprised that

* The following is an accurate list of them : Lieut. Col. Trench, J. Irving, Esq., T. H. Mortimer, Esq., J. R. Read, Esq. J. H. Urquhart, Esq. G. Hervey, Edw. Purchas, and J. Salmon, of LONDON ; Wm. Sloane, Esq. of RUMSEY, HANTS. ; T. A. Smith, jun. Esq. of LINCOLN ; E. K. Lacon, Esq. of ORMESBY, NORFOLK ; R. S. Lonsdale, T. B. Garwood, jun., and W. Wormack, jun. of YARMOUTH ; G. Oxenden, Esq. of BROOME, KENT ; Captain, George Beetham, (R. N.), C. Jeaffreson, Esq. of DULLINGHAM ; J. P. Allix, Esq. of SWAFFHAM ; John Tharpe, Esq. of CHIPPENHAM ; Rev. Sir H. Bate Dudley, of ELY ; J. Hall, Esq. of WESTON COLVILLE ; Rev. H. Finch, of SHELFORD ; John CROFTS, of BIGGLESWADE ; Daniel Death and Robert Ranson, of CHEVELEY ; John Perrin, of ASHLEY ; John Douglas, Esq., Edwd. Weatherby, and Sam. Pettit, of NEW-MARKET ; John Isaacson, of MOULTON ; Rev. Jas. Hand, of OUSDEN ; Wm. Collin, of KIRTLING ; Robt. King, John Chambers, John Tetsall, and Matt. Jennings, of WOOD DITTON ; Lieut. J. Nicholson, of DITTON ; John Headdy, of TRUMPINGTON ; John Purchas, and Thos. Ind, jun. of CHESTERTON.

his name was not in the list ; such an answer shewed him unfit to be a member of that band who muster at the roll-call, and receive orders from head quarters. The object in view was clearly shewn by the instant rejection, not only of forty of the most respectable inhabitants whom an Independent Corporator proposed instead of the forty foreigners ; but of the offer to support an equal number of respectable inhabitants, to be named by the proposer of those foreigners. To this there seemed at first an inclination to accede, or at least, a private discussion about it. But an agent (himself a foreign freeman,) who had just come from head-quarters, said in a low tone to a confidential few around him, “ It is of no use, “ the great man will never agree to it.”

The strong opposition of independent Corporators within, and the daily increasing storm of indignation from without, prevented, for that time, the introduction of a single foreigner. But, though that shameless attempt was baffled, think not that the object is relinquished ; your enemies have learnt caution and cunning ; not repentance or honesty, by their disappointment. The shame of exposed and baffled iniquity caused no punishment ; it operated as no warning ; for every feeling of honourable shame must have been stifled before the measure was proposed. That will be

attempted gradually which cannot be done suddenly. They wait till the storm of indignation shall have partly subsided. A single stranger, closely connected with your master, will be (while I write, has been) proposed. "One freeman," it is said, "can be of no consequence ; it will be peculiarly acceptable in a high quarter ; it is not intended to be a precedent, and will do no mischief." Such is the specious language by which you are wheedled into compliance, and such was the language by which your predecessors were lured into fatal consent a few years back. But I warn you, that it *is meant for a precedent*, and will do incalculable mischief, unless the resident free-men turn back, and retrieve the false step they have made. At every step downwards the descent is steepened, and return becomes more difficult. I warn you, that the proposal of more strangers *is in contemplation*, by one, two, or three at a time : every one admitted makes a voter more for the admission of others. The minds of some, who were startled at first, become familiarized ; and you will hereafter find out, when it is too late, that twenty times two are equal to forty.

Alike under the dominion of Lord Dover, or your present master, the admission of subservient strangers on the one part, has gone hand in hand

with the exclusion of rightful claimants on the other. And it naturally must; for those who claim by right, may, if they please, be independent. The right by apprenticeship is too clear to be questioned, and till of late iniquity had not acquired sufficient assurance to attempt to restrain it. The law of England imposes no limit of age*, and the bye law limiting the binding of the apprentice between the ages of 12 and 21, which has of late been threatened to be acted upon, is like some other of your bye laws, clearly illegal and void. The number as well as the age has been objected to, and the enrolment of the son of a resident freeman as an apprentice to his father was lately refused, because he had already another son apprenticed to him. The claim was insisted on at the next Common Hall, and the opponents durst

* At the Suffolk Assizes in 1821, a mandamus from Ipswich was tried, in which the plaintiff's admission was resisted on the ground of his being above the age of 30, a householder, and, I believe, married at the time of the binding, that he was previously managing clerk to his master (a banker), and that he carried on business for himself as a coal merchant during his apprenticeship; it was acknowledged that the object of the binding was to gain the freedom. But as it appeared that he duly served his master in the usual way during the seven years, the Learned Judge (Holroyd) completely scouted the idea of the age or the other circumstances of the plaintiff operating as disqualifications, and directed the Jury to find a verdict in his favor. It has been frequently decided in cases of parochial settlement, that the age of an apprentice does not affect the validity of the binding.

no longer refuse. I do not hesitate to say that those who resisted this enrolment must have known it to be legal ; the Corporation records abound with instances of three or four apprentices to one master being enrolled, *even on the same day*. It has been pretended that the circumstance of the apprentices being sons of the master, made a difference ; but they must have known that it could make no difference. Instances in Cambridge of sons being apprentices to their fathers had been frequent, and cases on the point had been decided in our Courts. An instance has, I am informed, lately occurred of the enrolment of a second apprentice being objected to, though neither he nor the first were sons of the master. In such cases the remedy is easy. The proper officers are bound to enrol at their peril ; and the Court of King's Bench would grant a peremptory mandamus to them with costs, which they must defray out of their own pockets, as any application of the Corporate funds to such purpose is illegal.

The right by birth was easier of invasion. We have seen how it was invaded in 1686 ; but the restraint which satisfied Lord Dover and the Courtiers of James II. was deemed insufficient by the present managers of the Borough, and the late Mr. Whittred was refused his freedom in 1817, because he was only the eldest and

not the first-born son of a freeman. For an account of the evasions with which his refusal was said to be accompanied, I refer you to the uncontradicted statements of his own pamphlet. On that occasion, an Alderman who prided himself on his classical education, seemed for a moment to have forgotten that language in which he had creditably acquitted himself at school and at college, and contended that the words "*maximus natu*" meant the first-born, the word "eldest" having found its way into the Corporation Books only through the ignorance of the Town Clerk, when the entries were directed by statute to be made in English. But what will be said of this pretended discovery in the Latin language, when it is now ascertained that this phrase was never used till the year 1679?

Mr. Whittred's untimely and lamented death put an end to the proceedings on the mandamus he had obtained; and deprived you of his further efforts in the cause of your independence. But he was not aware of the earlier history of the Borough, and did not suspect that the usage of admitting more than one son had ever existed. That discovery was made by a member of the Corporation and myself, when we inspected the ancient Corporation records in 1820. We found that the earliest entries were "Son," (*Filius*), or

“eldest son,” (sen. Filius), promiscuously ; that for above a hundred years the usage for the admission of all the sons had existed ; that during this period there were nearly forty instances of two or three brothers having been admitted in right of birth ; that this extensive usage had been altered only by a bye law, (and a bye law not strictly observed,) which had been enacted, while the Corporation existed under one sole charter, since adjudged to be void ; and of which the Chief Justice, Lord Kenyon, said—“ It with
 “ others, granted under the like circumstances,
 “ was one of the greatest grievances of the coun-
 “ try, and tended more than any thing else to
 “ bring about the revolution.”

On these and other grounds, it was thought expedient to try this important question, out of the residue of those funds which were found insufficient for enquiring before a Committee of the House of Commons into the elective franchise and the corruption of the Borough. It was thought that at all events, the investigation would put an end to the nonsense about “ Filius natu maximus ;”—those modern words which Lord Dover, or Charles II. had invented, and got inserted into the records to serve their corrupt purposes ; and that after this great prop was struck from beneath them, no Mayor would here-

after venture to refuse the admission of an eldest son. The evil of failure must be slight, the advantage of success great and permanent ; for though many whose right would have been established by it, are connected with those who support the existing system ; yet corruption cannot long remain with increased numbers. The base inducements that satisfy a few, will not be sufficient to purchase the many. Even the least scrupulous have a price, and will not incur the reproof of their own conscience and the certain displeasure and bad opinion of their fellow townsmen, without what they think an equivalent. Those who do the work of the author of evil, want that power of multiplying food for their hungry dependants, which he who came from above exercised for his holy followers.

The details of that trial, the manner in which it was conducted by the leading Counsel, and its result, are well known. The verdict decided ; not that younger sons had no right to their freedom, nor that the Corporation had the lawful power of altering the right to it, but that the Corporation had from time to time taken upon themselves to alter it, and therefore that there was not that uniformity which is necessary to constitute an ancient custom. Whether there was or was not such *ancient* (that is immemorial) *custom*, was

the only issue on the record, and on this sole point our leading Counsel, at an early consultation, advised us to frame the original affidavits; to which the writ of mandamus and the issue to be tried must conform; and to omit a different ground which the affidavits originally contained.

Yet the managers of the Borough are gifted with such elastic consciences that they do not object to extend the right, or dispense with the due proof of the claimant, when the effect would be of a different nature. A claimant by birth appeared, or was brought forward, who was not born in Cambridge. The Town Clerk, who seems not to have been in the secret, required, as usual, a certificate of his baptism, and objected to his admission, as it was stated he was not born in the town. But the objection, though founded on the invariable usage of the Borough, was overruled; and he was admitted. At the election in 1818, he acknowledged himself to have been born at Bagshot; a quo warranto was brought; he immediately disclaimed his right under the decided opinion of the late Deputy Recorder, and was of course disfranchised. Had he remained a freeman, it is probable this would have been used as a precedent for all other sons born out of Cambridge; and thus your rulers, not content with bringing in their hordes of foreigners, would have entailed upon the town

the curse of having the descendants of those foreigners to trample upon its rights in succeeding generations.

We must now go on (at least till some more successful event may restore the older rights,) with the same abridged claims to admission; and the same loaves and fishes to be doled out among the smaller numbers of venal applicants. The means that supply them are, however, somewhat exhausted. Promotions and ships, to those who earn them by voting instead of fighting, must be rarer, till another war be undertaken to create fresh patronage for Ministers, and fresh encroachments upon our own Constitution. The domestic harvest of bribes is nearly gotten in, and will soon be stopped in its distribution. For, not content with offering temptations from without, the corruptors of the Borough have perverted the public funds in the hands of the Corporation itself, to the private advantage of the favoured Corporators: and the property intrusted to their management, for the general benefit of the town, has been in many instances parcelled out among venal Freemen, at trifling fines and rentals. Formerly, the terms of a lease were referred to a Committee of eight, viz. : four Aldermen chosen by the Mayor, and four Common Councilmen, by the Common

Council. But in 1786, a bye-law was passed, giving the appointment of the whole eight to the Mayor. When you recollect what interest had just then gained the ascendancy, and who and what your Mayors were for the next thirty years, you will be at no loss to detect the motive, or to discover the effects of this change. I will give but one instance, which has been stated to me on authority that I cannot dispute. A lease of some land to Mr. Cutchie had, a few years ago, run out. By a wholesome order made in 1758, all leases wholly or nearly run out, were to be advertised in the Cambridge paper for renewal to the best bidder. On the contrary, in this instance a reference was made to eight Corporators appointed by the mayor, according to the new regulation, and the lease was proposed at a Common Hall to be granted to a late Alderman for a fine of two guineas and an annual rent of £1. A due feeling of disapprobation instantly arose; one freeman present offered £100 for it, and another £150; and the sealing of the lease was in consequence postponed. But at a subsequent Common Hall, when not ten persons were present, an Alderman of great influence proposed and carried the sealing of the lease on the low terms at first mentioned. If this be true, words are wanting to characterise its iniquity, and to express a due feeling of indignation; if it be not true, it will be easily contradicted.

Not only the funds for general purposes have been thus destroyed ; but even those of charitable bequests have been misappropriated. By the will of John Crane, who died in 1654, the rents of estates now amounting to near £400, come every fifth year to the town of Cambridge for charitable purposes.* This revenue has been regularly received by the Corporation, and seems to have been considered as a part of its usual funds. For it does not appear, during many years past, to have been disposed of according to the purposes directed by the will. Much enquiry and discussion have of late taken place ; and the Trustees have now called upon the Corporation, to appropriate this and the preceding payment to its proper purposes.

It appears from a statement published in the Independent Press of Feb. 1st, that the Cor-

* After the receipts have accumulated to 200*l*. which is to be lent without interest to twenty young men, the succeeding rents are “ to be given and bestowed upon honest poor men that be in
“ prison for debt, or old women, or the relief of poor men in want,
“ or to relieve them out of prison for debt, desiring them in-
“ trusted in this business, as they will answer it before God ; that
“ they relieve the most honest, godliest, and religious persons.
“ men and women, in the said several towns, that have lived well,
“ and had a good report, being fallen into decay by some extra-
“ ordinary occasion, and not to give it to dissembling hypocritical
“ persons.”

poration have now another fund of £1000 from Sir Thomas White's benefaction, which ought to be lent in loans of £25 each to poor young men, "free-men and inhabitants." Who are the forty young men who at present have them, those of you who are Corporators best know; I am unable to learn the name of any of them. How the trusts of other charitable or public bequests have been disposed of, we may conjecture from these examples. No adequate check has existed either on receipts of payments. The Charter of Charles I. directs Two Treasurers to be *annually* elected and sworn before the Mayor and the Vice-Chancellor; yet from 1787 to 1819 a late Alderman acted as Sole Treasurer without ever having been duly elected, or annually sworn in; if indeed he was sworn in at any time.

Deep as are the wrongs which this town has suffered in other respects; atrocious as is the iniquity which has been practised in other transactions, they are almost thrown into shade by the circumstances just alluded to. Many of the Corporation were doubtless ignorant of the facts, and can only be blamed for their inattention. But the ingenuity of the Actors on these occasions, combine two distinct crimes in one act; they do not simply pervert the public funds of the Town to private use; they do not simply embezzle from

the sacred chest of charity, and deprive the indigent mechanic, the aged poor, or the honest imprisoned debtor, of those legacies which benevolence had bequeathed to them, but they apply that very embezzlement to the violation of the independence of the Town ; to the transfer of our Parliamentary representation to a stranger. I call the funds of the Corporation the public funds of the Town ; and should have thought this too clear for remark, were I not aware that some bad men had pretended that their proper object was the advantage of the individual Corporators. If these men rely on fact or usage, I readily admit that these funds *have long been* exclusively appropriated to such purposes. What useful plans, what public improvements have the Corporation undertaken ? to what charitable subscriptions, to what benevolent institutions have they made donations ? To none ! for I suppose they will not quote the paltry sum of £50. to the Great Bridge, which under the statute of 22. Henry VIII. they are bound to repair ; nor the complimentary donation to the Countrymen of that Member, who is insultingly brought unknowing and unknown from another kingdom, and *appointed* Member for this degraded Town ; as if injury were insufficient to humble you unless insult were added. I mean not to reflect upon the character of the gallant Colonel, whose courteous and gentlemanly de-

meanour on the occasion, when I was opposed to him*. I fully felt; and whose private character may perhaps deserve your esteem, if he were not thus obtruded on the Town of Cambridge.

But to return—originally, every incorporation of Towns or Boroughs, was no more than a separation to a greater or less extent from the power and Courts of the Sheriff; and an exemption from vassalage to the Crown or the Baron; a grant of the Tolls and of the privilege to choose their own Magistrates. The Corporation was not of the individuals, but of the town or its inhabitants. On the other hand, incorporation of trades, of Colleges, or other bodies are, of the individuals. The Charters of Cambridge are very clear and strong on this point. Of course all corporate property is vested in them only as trustees for the benefit of the town. What would be said of a College, if they parcelled out their estates on leases at insufficient rents and fines, to the injury of their successors, among a part of those existing members who *are* entitled to share the revenues? How much more unworthy is the act of thus parcelling them out among those who *are not* entitled to any dividend or share of the revenues? Still more when it is done to an extent that leaves the receipts unequal to defray their ordinary expences,

* The general election in 1820.

and tempts them to devote the rents of charity estates to such disbursements. Fortunately, the law provides an easy remedy for a part at least of these malversations; it is the duty and the interest of the inhabitants to enforce those remedies which, I trust, will not be long neglected. Myself, an inhabitant, I lay them open to the other inhabitants, that their attention may be awakened to the remedy of the past, and the prevention of future evils.

Among the lesser artifices of the confederates, it is curious to observe one attempt at imposition, uttered and insinuated by them with as much gravity and composure as if they really had imposed upon themselves. They affect to consider the late trial as an attack upon the corporation! as if to add to that body a number of men as respectable as the rest (for they must be the sons, brothers, or uncles of them) could be an attack upon the body itself: as if to confer upon all their sons (instead of one only) a desirable privilege, could be an injury to men who had only honest ends in view! It was, in fact, an attempt to benefit the Corporation, though certainly an attack upon the bad junto who aim only at making it a source of corrupt gain. By what means those fathers, and even mothers, were prevailed on to assist in depriving their own offspring of the

franchise, it is not for me to say. Whether their sons be disposed to tread in their steps, or to entertain worthier sentiments, they will equally feel that their parents in pursuing this object had not only disregarded their neighbour's interest, but had deliberately joined in opposing the welfare and privileges of their own children.

I have thus detailed and explained to you all that I now deem requisite. Hereafter I may again address you from time to time, as occasion may require; and I have at present little more to add.

To those, who are the constant conspirators and active agents in the destruction of your rights, and in the continuance of your subjection to a stranger—to those who have been long accustomed to

“ Fish up their dirty and dependent bread

“ From pools and ditches of the Commonwealth,

“ Sordid and sickening at their own success,”*

it is alike useless to offer argument, to expose them to shame, or to load them with reproaches. Before they made their bargain with the tempter, before they sold themselves and their nefarious activity to their suborners, they well knew that

they could not possess two inconsistent enjoyments ; that they could not unite the reward of such misdeeds with the respect and esteem of their fellow-townsmen, with the satisfaction of an honourable mind, and with the cheering sensations of an approving conscience. They knew that they could not serve God and Mammon ; and knowing this they made their choice. Like the Wandering Jew, the mark is on their foreheads, and destiny urges them on their way : they have thought, in direct opposition to the saying of the wisest of men, " That riches are rather to be chosen than a good name ; and silver and gold than loving favor."* However restless they may feel, they must pursue their downward course. They are so wedded to infamy that they cannot be divorced from her. They may serve as a warning to others, but will never retrace their own steps. Hating those who are independent and virtuous, because they know that by such they are despised ; distrusting and supplanting one another ; they live without respect, and die without regret. Of such I would say, in the words of Holy Writ, " Ephraim is joined unto idols, let him alone ;"† were there not still some other check on their actions. Fear may affect those, whom conscience

* Proverbs of Solomon, ch. xv., v. 1.

† Hosea, ch. iv.

cannot. Insensible to any awe, and callous to any lash but that of the law, they still shrink from the searching eye and uplifted hand of Justice; and may still find that there are limits, which they may think not very safe, though very desirable to be overstepped.

But there is a class who are not yet enlisted under the banners of the conspirators, who may have incautiously joined as volunteers, and can withdraw when they find out, or begin seriously to think on the nature and object of the service required of them.

Most of the new freemen have as yet done nothing to sully their character for independence.— If they reflect for what purpose Corporations of Towns are instituted; for what end and aim the House of Commons is assembled, and of what use in the Constitution, they will easily perceive the right course for themselves to pursue. Is not that House a body of representatives sent to enact such laws as may conduce to the general good? to hold the purse strings of the nation? and thereby to see that the expenditure is proper and necessary? to controul and bring to punishment the Ministers of the Crown, if their acts be illegal and unconstitutional? to check and balance the power of the King and of the Nobles, by maintaining and

defending the just liberties of the people ? Were they not originally, and ought they not ever to be, freely elected by the counties and the towns they represent ? If honest men be elected, they will, without reward, conscientiously support every measure in Parliament which they think beneficial to the country ; every vote of money which they think honestly, usefully, and advantageously applied. It can only be, when a Minister urges measures and votes which are not so, that bribes are necessary : for I call it equally a bribe, whether for the sake of procuring those votes, money be given to the individual, or places and promotions to himself or his relations. When several Members confederate in their votes, and in their demands, the plunder becomes greater as their request becomes more irresistible. Places useless or overpaid are created or preserved for the purpose of that bribery ; and the enquiry, even as to offices, useful and important is, not whether the man be fit for the office, but whether the office will satisfy the man. The great business of administering public affairs is worse conducted, and the same double crime is thus united in one act, alike in the concerns of the nation as in those of the town. Additional money is wrung from the people in order to bribe their should-be representative to act against their welfare. The Members themselves, knowing

they must buy their votes before they can sell them at their pleasure, are under the dishonest necessity of creating the means of purchase : and so into places of all sorts, shapes, and sizes, the plunder of an impoverished nation is assorted. Would the lucrative offices and promotions obtained by a few individuals in the corporation, ever have been so bestowed, were it not to secure the votes of the two nominal Members for the town on whatever measure the Minister chose to favor or oppose? Has there been, during the last thirty-five years, a single vote ever given by either of these Members in favor of economy or civil liberty—against any expence however wasteful—against any encroachment on the rights which our ancestors have handed down to us—against any measure however ill-planned—in short against the will of any Minister, Pitt, Addington, or Grenville ; Portland, Percival, or Castlereagh? Is there any man “daring enough to deny these facts, or shameless enough to defend them”?

If I may be excused the comparing of great things with small, let me put a case. We elect two Paving Commissioners from each of the fourteen parishes of Cambridge ; suppose a few individuals were able to procure the election of whomsoever they pleased, and by means of the Commissioners so elected, of creating new

offices, preserving those that had become useless, and of filling the proper offices with improper persons; if you thus found yourselves more heavily assessed, while many of the streets were ill paved and half lighted, what would be your sentiments? and is there any difference between the two cases, except in the magnitude of the evil, and therefore of the greater criminality of such conduct? Many of these men I am speaking of, may be honest in their private transactions, may call themselves moral in private life, and might shrink from the temptation of fraud or injustice towards their neighbour. Is not the conscientious giving of a vote, and the due performance of a trust, as much a matter of honesty and morality, as the conduct in private transactions? Does the injustice become less because it is spread among many; because he only wounds a hundred, instead of killing one? Is there any other difference than that the one injures a single or a few individuals, the other does wrong to thousands; and injury perhaps irretrievable to our latest descendants? I ask, whether all the fraud and injustice, which it was possible for the corrupt members of Corporations to have practised in private life, could have produced half the injury that their electioneering conduct has done?

Some, perhaps, may try to excuse their participation in such measures under the plea of gratitude

for favours received ; may thus attempt to satisfy others, and may fancy they satisfy themselves. It is an old artifice for vices on a great scale, to assume the name and to hold forth the pretence of virtues. Gratitude in its genuine purity is one of the most heavenly virtues ; but has not this, like every other virtue, its due limits. Suppose a benefactor were to ask one of you to unite in a plan of private robbery—to violate a private trust—or give a false verdict on a jury; what would be the reply? Would he not say, ‘I feel the obligation, and will be ready to repay it by every lawful or honourable means in my power, but even for you I cannot transgress the duty I owe to my neighbour, and myself.’ If asked to favour public robbery, or violate a public trust, ought not his answer to be the same? ought he not to refuse to violate his duty to his fellow townsmen, and his fellow countrymen? And this should be his line of conduct even if the occasion were unforeseen, if the benefactor had conferred the favour gratuitously and thought not of such a return till afterwards; but here the favour is conferred *with the view and for the sole purpose* of influencing the vote at an election, or the conduct at a corporate meeting. Would it have been conferred on one who did not possess this corporate privilege? Is it any thing else than paying the bribes sometime before the performance of the corrupt misdeed instead of paying it afterwards. It is a profanation of the word ; it is an insult as

well as an injury to morality, to call such base services and unjust expectations, by the hallowed name of Gratitude. It is only adding hypocrisy to crime.

One word as to him who seems to influence the whole. If the frequency and notoriety of such facts did not abate our wonder, we might feel surprised that any man of high rank and ancient family ; whose wealth might leave him nothing to want for himself ; whose vast domains and a seat in one House of Parliament, might give all the lawful influence and constitutional power, which an honourable mind would wish—that any such man should degrade and vilify himself by an unprincipled traffic for seats in the House of Commons ; by an intrusion into towns where he has neither property nor natural connection ; and should, for the sake of procuring places for a few relatives or dependents, submit to the same insolence from his inferiors, with which he urges his own demands to the Minister.* If principle do not

* I have heard an anecdote relating to another Borough, which may afford an instance of the degrading dictation that great and proud men will submit to when such corrupt influence is at stake. A person wrote to a Peer requesting for his son the presentation to a living then vacant. The Peer answered, that he had found among his father's papers a memorandum of a promise to another clergyman, and that according to that promise he felt bound to dispose of it, but that he was anxious to provide for his son at an early opportunity. The person in his reply, after the usual flourish about his son's merits, concluded

check him, we might naturally expect that pride would prevent such degradation.

The greater part of those to whom this letter is addressed : the great mass of respectable and intelligent inhabitants of this Town, have unfortunately no direct and immediate means of rescuing the Borough from the foul domination which it has long groaned under and abhorred. But still a great deal is in their power ; their animated and decided efforts in 1818, did much in preventing that fresh flood of foreigners* that threatened to overwhelm them. It alarmed the vicious ; it animated and supported the independent part of the Corporation ; it awakened the better feeling of those who shewed that they were not entirely devoted to the will of a stranger, nor quite insensible to the welfare and respectability of the Town. To these united efforts, that body of Corporators I have just alluded to are indebted, that they are not dictated to on the floor of their Town Hall by the Steward, the Gamekeeper, or the Gardener of a Stranger. The Corporation

thus : “ in the Borough of S—— there are thirty-five electors, of which I and my near connections constitute seven.” It is perhaps unnecessary to add, that his request was immediately complied with.

* The word “ foreigner” is early and often used in the Corporation books, in speaking of freemen who were non-resident.

has lately shown a manly feeling of independence in the choice of the Mayors, by persevering in this determined opposition to foreigners, and to other encroachments or guidances; and by this course alone they can save themselves from it in future. Vigilance, extreme vigilance is necessary. Perhaps it is not generally known that a plan was lately in agitation, to introduce a new domestic manager, and a new code of bye-laws for the "*better governing*" of the Borough. A late departure has checked it for a time; but it is by no means given up.

There are many offences against society and morality, which from their nature laws cannot control, or Courts of Justice punish; against which the only check is public opinion and censure. For this very reason, that censure should be expressed and shown more decidedly towards them. Few, very few, disregard the good or bad opinion of those among whom they live. The fear of reproach may often prevail, where conscience would not; and men would hesitate and often desist from their intent, if they found that by betraying their fellow-townsmen, and bartering away for a mess of porridge their own and their neighbours' birthright to a Stranger, they brought coolness from their friends; contempt, indignation, and reproach from all around them.

Had the same right feeling and energy been exerted from the year 1785 to 1790, that have lately appeared, the evils which then were inflicted might have been successfully opposed. The freedom would not then have been voted to fifty foreigners on one day, without a single townsman among them. To the carelessness, or timidity of our predecessors, we attribute the present subjection of the Borough. The most gloomy and desponding will therefore have this satisfaction, this result of our efforts, that we have done our duty; and cannot be reproached by our descendants for the faults which we blame in the freemen and inhabitants of former times. But I trust there is no one who does not see much more, who is not convinced that steady perseverance must succeed and bring the Corporate rights to be vested in those hands where alone they ought to be, in a numerous and respectable body of inhabitants of the town.

I am,

GENTLEMEN,

Your sincere well-wisher,

GEORGE PRYME.

SYDNEY-STREET, CAMBRIDGE,

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